

The Million Dollar Mystery

By HAROLD MAC GRATH

Illustrated from Scenes in the Photo Drama of the Same Name by the Thanhouser Film Company

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CHAPTER XIII.

An Agent From Russia.

The Black Hundred, not as individuals but as an organization, began to worry. Powerful, and often reckless and daring because it was powerful, it began to look about for some basic cause for all these failures against Hargrave's daughter and Hargrave's ghost. They had tried to put the in-

mer. Those government plans of the fortifications of the Panama are waiting. There's your millions. But the fact remains that it is the law of the Black Hundred never to step down till absolutely defeated. The hidden million is but half; we must find and break this renegade Hargrave.

"If he lives," said Braine.

"Who can say one way or the other?" brazenly asked Paroff. "The



Norton Wanted to Kiss Her.

reads about in the Persian tales. As a matter of fact, after the second sneeze he had gone up to the roof, got out by the trap, and jumped—rather risky business, too—to the next roof and had clambered down the fire escape of the second building. He was swearing madly. After all these days of care and planning, after all his cleverness in locating the rendezvous of the Black Hundred, and now to lose his advantage because of an uncontrollable sneeze! He would never dare go back, and just when he was beginning to pick up fine bits of information. So Florence Hargrave was going to have a new father in a day or so? There were some clever rogues among this band of theirs; but their cleverness was well offset by an equal number of fools.

Yes, there were some clever rogues, and to prove this assertion Braine secured a taxi and drove furiously away, his destination the home of his ancient enemy. He dropped the cab a block or two away and presently stowed himself away in the summer house at the left of the lawn. It would have been a capital idea—that is, if the other man had not thought of and anticipated this very thing. So he used a public pay station telephone, and Braine waited in vain, waited till the lights in the Hargrave house went out one by one and it became wrapped in darkness within and moonlight without.

Braine was a philosopher. He returned to his waiting taxi and drove home, paid the bill, smiling grimly, and went to bed. It was going to be a wonderful game of blind man's buff, and it was going to be sport to watch this fool Paroff blunder into a pit.

The next afternoon Florence and Norton sat in the summer house talking of the future. Lovers are prone to talk of that. As if anything else in the world ever equals the present! They talked of nice little apartments and vacations in the summer and how much they would save out of his salary, and a thousand and one other things which would not interest you at all if I recounted them in detail. But they did love each other, and they were going to be married, you may be certain of that. They did not care a snap of the finger what Jones thought. They were going to be married, and that was all there was to it. Of course, Florence couldn't touch a penny of her father's money. If he, Norton, couldn't take care of her without help, why, he wouldn't be worth the powder to blow him up with.

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quintessential reporter out of the way; they had laid every trap they could think of to catch the mysterious visitor at the Hargrave home; they had thrown out a hundred lures to bring Hargrave out of his lair, and failed, and they had lost a dozen valuable men and several thousand dollars. This must end somewhere, and quickly.

The one ray of hope for the conspirators lay in the fact that Florence had never seen her father and knew not in the least what he looked like. They determined to try again in this direction.

"Give it all up," said the countess to Braine. "I tell you, whatever is back of all this is stronger than we are. He knows the organization, and for all we know he may be a ghost."

"I never go back," smiled Braine.

"There's something more than the million. There's the sport of the thing. We've been beaten in a dozen bouts, and nearly always by a Duke. They have the breaks, as they say out at the Polo grounds."

"Put the time and expense when we might be getting results elsewhere! I tell you, too, I'm afraid. It's like always hearing some one behind you and never finding anybody when you turn. I have told you my doubts. I have also asked you to trap that butler, but you've always laughed."

"Give it all up," said the countess again.

"To act frankly and in the open, to go boldly to the Hargrave home and proclaim myself Hargrave. I can disguise myself in a manner that will at least temporarily nod the butler."

"Who has been with his master for fourteen years, knows every move, habit, gesture, inflection," interposed Braine. "Put proceed, count, proceed. You will remember the old adage: too many cooks."

"Ah," flashed back the count, "but a new cook!"

Olga touched Braine's arm warningly.

You mean, then, that there has been talk in St. Petersburg of disposing of some one?"

"A good deal of talk, sir," haughtily forgetting that he had bent humbly enough but a few moments ago.

"Very well, go on."

Thought the man at the peephole above: "There's another adage: When thieves fall out, then honest men get their dues. Yes, yes, proceed, proceed!"

Paroff went on. "I shall, then, go frankly to the Hargrave home and claim my own. Meantime I leave to you the business of luring the butler away. Half an hour is all I need to bring that child here, to break the seal that stands between us and what we seek."

"Is that so?" murmured Braine. "Olga, I want you to play a trick on this handsome delegate-at-large. I'm not very enthusiastic over his talk. I want him humiliated. All you have to do, he says, is to walk into the Hargrave house and walk out again. Well, let's you and I see that he does that and nothing else. I'll have no one meddling with my own name."

Some one sneezed, and everybody looked at his neighbor. The sneeze was repeated, but muffled, as if some one was desperately anxious to avoid sneezing.

"It came from above!" whispered Olga. "Don't look up!"

Braine was cool. He walked idly across the room to where Vroom sat. "Very well, Paroff: we give you free rein." To Vroom he said: "Some one is watching us from the room overhead. I thought that room belonged to us."

"It does," said Vroom stolidly.

"Then how is it that some one is watching from up there? No excitement. I'm going to bid every one good-night, then I'm going to investigate. When I leave you will quietly send me to all exits to the building. I want the man who sneezed, and I want him badly."

"We are absolutely certain that this is the case," said the nominal head, who was known as the president. "But we tried one play in that direction, and it failed miserably."

"I have the story," replied Paroff. "It was clumsy done. The ruse was an old one."

Braine was frank enough to admit the truth of this statement, however much he disliked the admission. He nodded.

"I have authority to take a hand in this affair. We cannot waste all sum-

"I would," he smiled. He wanted to kiss her, but the eternal Jones might be watching from the windows, and so he patted her hand instead and walked down the gravelled path to the street.

It was difficult work for Florence to play at friendship. She was like her father; she did not bestow it on everyone. She had given her friendship to the Russian, the first real big friendship in her life, and she had been roughly disillusioned. But if the countess could act, so could she; and of the two her acting was the more consummate. She could smile and laugh and jest, all the while her heart was burning with wrath.

One day, a week or so after her meeting with Norton in the summer house, Olga arrived, beautifully gowned, handsome as ever. There was not the least touch of the adventuress in her makeup. Florence had just received some mail and she had dropped the letters on the library table to greet the countess. She had opened them, but had not yet seated at their contents.

They were chatting pleasantly about inconsequential things, when the maid came in and asked Florence to come to Miss Susan's room for a moment. Florence excused herself, wondering what Susan could want. She forgot that the maid.

As soon as she was gone the countess, certain that Jones was not lurking about, picked up the letters and calmly examined their contents: and among them she found this remarkable document: "Dear daughter I have never seen: I must turn the treasure over to you. Meet me at eight in the summer house. Tell no one as my life is in danger. Your loving father."

The countess could have laughed aloud. She saw this man Paroff's hand; and here was the chance to torment and humiliate him and send him off packing to his cold and miserable country. She had made up once as Florence, and she could easily do so again. The only thing that troubled her was the fact that she did not know whether Florence had read the letter

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fact that all your plans and schemes have come to naught should prove to you that you are not fighting a ghost. There is but one way to bring out the truth."

"And that is to make a captive of his daughter," supplemented Braine. "And we have worked toward that end ceaselessly. We are quite ready to listen to your suggestions, count."

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